(c) whether Government propose to do investigation in this regard; and

(d) if so, what action has been taken against those who were found to be responsible for the fire?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV) : (a) The incidence of fire over 300 hectare of forests, as appeared in media, has been reported from 'Pania Sanctuary' which is adjacent to Gir Sanctuary.

(b) The forest fire occurred in Gir East Forest Division, Dhari on 6-03-2003 in Chanchai beat. Around 350 hectares area is estimated to be affected by the fire with an estimated loss of Rs. 15,000. Dry fallen leaves, dry twigs and dry grass have been reported to be burnt. No injuries to wild animals has been reported.

(c) and (d) Forest protection at the field level is primarily the responsibility of the State Government. The State Government has been asked to take expeditious action for investigating the cause of the fire and to take follow-up action against the persons found responsible for the incident.

**Dwindling mangrove cover**

4378. SHRI B. J. PANDA :
SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA :

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware of the reports "Warning bells over dwindling mangrove cover" in Orissa, as appeared in the media;

(b) whether the cover offers the greatest bio-diversity next to Papua New Guinea, in the world;

(c) whether this forest has not been receiving the required attention in our country and it has under-gone vast degradation; and

(d) if so, help rendered by the Centre to save this dwindling cover in Orissa ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV) : (a) Government of India have not received any such report.

(b) Worldover it is acknowledged as one of the rich Mangrove areas with exciting biodiversity covering wide range of species of both plants and animals.

(c) and (d) Bhitarkanika, Mahanadi, Subernrekha, Devi, Dhamra and Chilka Mangrove areas in Orissa have been identified by Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests for intensive conservation and management. Financial assistance is extended to the State Government for implementation of Management action Plans on all the identified Mangrove areas. In the aftermath of Super Cyclone in Orissa during October, 1999 Ministry has extended financial assistance to Government of Orissa for establishment of National Mangrove Genetic Resource Centre in the State. According to the State of Forest Report (1999) an increase of 20 sq. km. of Mangrove cover has been reported in Orissa during 1995—1999.

**Death of Olive Ridley Turtles**

4379. SHRI SURENDRA LATH : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government have investigated into the causes of the death of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles in Orissa;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the approximate number of sea turtles died in the State during the last three years; and

(c) the steps taken to give proper protection to these rare species?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV) : (a) and (b) The major causes of death of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles in Orissa are as under :

1. Injury due to collision with mechanized trawlers/boats.

2. Suffocation after getting entangled in the fishing nets.